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An exploratory study on factors contributing to drop- out of learners at Namibia College of Open Learning (NAMCOL).

Formal Education
Open Schooling

By: Mr. Joel Kavetuna, NAMCOL.

Chapter

1. Introduction

This study on the reasons why learners drop out from NAMCOL was important to do because NAMCOL has experienced an increase in the drop outs rate. Of course, the reasons for dropout are numerous and complex. Accordingly, the phenomenon of adult learner dropout cannot be understood by looking at just one or two variables.

This paper examines the issue of college learner dropout in four NAMCOL educational regions:

Northern Region, which caters for

- Omusati, Oshana, Ohangwena and Oshikoto political regions

North-Eastern Region, which caters for

- Kavango and Caprivi political regions

Central Region, which caters for

- Kunene, Erongo and part of Otjozondjupa political regions

Southern Region, which caters for

- Khomas, Hardap, Karas, Omaheke and part of Otjozondjupa political regions.

The study focused on the dropout learners in grade 10 and 12 in 2008-2009. The researcher used regional office staff and the head office NAMCOL centres to reach out to learner through the learner representative councils and minister semi-structured interview schedules. Regional managers, area coordinators, head of centers, tutors, parents or caregivers were also consulted to detect at-risk factors so that these can be addressed early on an attempt to reduce the likelihood of learner dropout.

Most states are far from the 90% graduation rate that was targeted in the early 1990s (National Educational Goals Panel, 2002).

1.1 Definition of terms

Since NAMCOL provides programmes for adult and out-of-school learners, specialized terminology has been devised to refer to this clientele. In order to establish a basis for comparison with the formal education system, it is necessary to define the terms used in this study.

Dropout - Each year, significant number of NAMCOL learners terminates their studies without sitting for the examination for which they had been preparing. The term 'dropout' refers to NAMCOL subject enrolments, which cannot be traced as examination subject entries at the appropriate level, plus subject entries that are given an 'incomplete' mark because candidates failed to complete all of the requirements for the examination (NAMCOL Statistical Digest, 2003/4).

Subject enrolment/subject entry - This study uses the term 'subject enrolment' to provide a common denominator for comparison of the college's learner with those studying in formal schools. A 'subject enrolment' refers to each subject for which a learner has enrolled, regardless of level or mode of study (NAMCOL Statistical Digest, 2003/4). In addition, several other terms require explanation or technical definition; Level - Although the term 'phase' is commonly used in Namibia to refer to the Junior (Grade 8-10) and Senior (Grade 11-12) cycle of secondary education, it is not considered appropriate for NAMCOL learners who study the full syllabus for each phase in a single year. Instead, the study uses the term 'level' to refer to the type of examination for which a learner is preparing (NAMCOL Statistical Digest, 2003/4).

At-risk learner - A learner who experiences or reveals several risk factors such as poor grades, high rate of absenteeism, repetition, discipline and behavioural problems, low self-esteem and low socioeconomic background, indicating that such a learner might be in danger of dropping out (Möwes, 1997).

1.2 Meaning of dropout

Before schools can tackle the problem of school dropouts, they need to know who is considered a dropout and who is a graduate. Numerous definitions of dropouts appear in the educational literature and the lack of a common definition and standard data collection procedures have left educators and policy makers with little accurate and reliable information about dropouts.

Research shows that leaving school early is the outcome of a long process of disengagement from the school (Christon, Sinclair, Lehr, & Godler, 2001); dropout is preceded by indicators of withdrawal (e.g., poor attendance) or unsuccessful school experiences (e.g., academic or behavioral difficulties) that often begin in elementary school. Overt indicators of disengagement are generally accompanied by feelings of alienation, poor sense of belonging, and a general dislike of school.

Dropout statistics can be used to monitor the success of schools and identify students needing special attention. In addition, statistics would provide an overall indication of the success of the educational system. To make these assessments, however, data must be collected according to the same definitions, using the same procedures, and over the same period of time (Clements, 1990). Graduation and dropout rates must therefore be comparable across regions and centres.

Some definitions of dropouts are very broad and general, while others are specific and technical. Spencer (1977:2) describes "a student who has dropped out of reasons other than promotion, transfer, completion of secondary school or death", including those who were dropped out the schools, because of excessive absence from school.

In conclusion the researcher's definition in terms of 'NAMCOL learner dropout' is a learner who enrolled with College and fails to register for the exams. Also learners who did or did not submit the first, second assignment and write mock exams but fail to sit for the final exams. Even those who sit for the final exams and received ungraded results are regarded as learners who dropout

11. Literature review

Education is a key to developing the economic, social, scientific and political institutions of nation states (Lockheed and Verspoor 1991) Hence access to education is at the centre of the development agenda of most low-income countries. Namibia in the arenas of education and training is not exception and NAMCOL in particular. The startling statistic that one high school student drops out every 9 seconds illustrates the magnitude of the problem (Children's Defense Fund, 2002) Dropout rates are highest among students with emotional and behavioral disabilities; half of the students dropped out of school in 1998-1999 (U.S. Department of education, 2001) which the case in Namibia such the 2008-2009.

Dropout statistics are particularly alarming because jobs that pay living wages and benefits have virtually disappeared for youth without a high school certificate. For society, the costs of dropout are staggering, estimated in billions of dollars in lost revenue, welfare programs, unemployment programs, underemployment, and crime prevention and prosecution (Christenson, Sinclair, Lehr,

& Hurley, 2000). Given these individual and societal consequences, facilitating school completion for all students must be a critical concern for researchers, policymakers, and educators across the country.

The National Dropout Prevention Center at Clemon University has studied the issue of dropout for nearly two decades and has developed a database cataloguing such programs (Schargel & Smink, 2001). This is lacking at NAMCOL in Namibia for now. A comprehensive review of dropout interventions (Lehr, Hanson, Sinclair, & Christenson, 2003) indicated that the dropout research has been overwhelmingly predictive or descriptive (i.e., there have been few controlled studies), and the methodology used to evaluate the effectiveness of the majority of dropout interventions has been judged to be low quality or poor scientific merit.

Enrolment in basic education worldwide have increased and there has been a sharp drop in the number of out-of-school children worldwide (UNESCO 2007). The total number of primary school-age children not in primary or secondary school is estimated to have fallen by 21% between 2002 and 2005 compared to only 5% between 1999-2002. In spite of these promising trends, sub-Saharan Africa accounts for 45% of all out-of-school children (over 72 million globally in 2005) (UNESCO 2007).

111. Discussion of the research process

3.1 Steps followed in doing the research

The topic was chosen, information about NAMCOL was gathered and questionnaires were designed. The questionnaire was distributed among NAMCOL learners, tutors and parents within the NAMCOL regions.

3.2 Methods used and some reasons for doing it that way

The methods that were used are questionnaires and face-to-face interviews because of the nature of the respondents.

3.3 Advantages and disadvantages

Even though these methods were used they have their pros and cons. For example the questionnaire: it requires little training for the researcher as it can be used within a short period of time and with limited resources.

The researcher may find it difficult to check whether subjects understood the questions because the researcher may not be there to explain unclear questions to the respondents. Lastly, it may result in low response rate and response bias meaning that respondents may be few and unfair if there are some who cannot read and write properly.

Relevant data were collected through questionnaires for learners, tutors, and caregivers/ parents. The second section on all three instruments was seeking to find out what problems learners experience and what factors may lead to dropping out of NAMCOL. The last section for all three questionnaires were consisting of the open-ended questions in which any comments on dropping out from NAMCOL was required.

The researcher design that was used in this study is a survey. A survey is a structured way of learning about a larger group of people by obtaining information from a representative sample of that particular group of people (Mpofu, 2000:39).

Some of the advantages of a survey are that it describes the characteristics of a large population and there is no other method of observation, which can provide this general capability. It allows many questions to be asked about a given topic by giving considerable flexibility to the analysis. Questions will be standardized and measurement will be more precise by enforcing uniform definitions upon the respondents.

All in all, a survey has also disadvantages, which includes the inflexibility because it requires the researcher to stick to the initial study design meaning, the tools and the administration of the tools to remain unchanged throughout the process of data collection. It requires the researcher to ensure that a large number of the selected sample would respond to the questions. On the other hand, respondents may find it difficult to recall information or to tell the truth about controversial questions.

A survey is chosen because it obtains information because of the nature of the study. Another importance is that the target group of the study is a large group of people, which is in the four NAMCOL educational regions of Namibia.

A survey is also a single most widely used research design in educational research; therefore, it was used in this educational research as well. A survey is used to measure attitudes, opinions and achievements meaning any number of variables in the natural setting either at a local, regional, national or even international.

3.4 Challenges encountered and how they were solved

Some of the participants did not completely fill or answer all the questions. If all the questions were filled completely the study could have produced genuine findings that can be generalized to the whole NAMCOL educational regions.

The fact that there were so many commitments and the time allocated was inadequate, the study was not conducted to all NAMCOL centres. Four regions that were selected could represent the whole country. Therefore, the findings of this study can be generalized.

Most of the parents were illiterate to semi-literate especially those outside Windhoek, capital city of Namibia. It was very difficult to use the questionnaire; the researcher opted for face to face interview.

IV. Findings

Since its establishment, the College has shown positive growth. This is evidenced by the fact that the enrolment figure increased from 16 640 in 1997 to 28 942 in 2009. Similarly, the pass rates increased significantly from 59.4% in 1997 to 91.6% in 2009 for JSC; and from 59.2% in 1997 to 81.8% in 2009 for NSSCO (formerly IGSCE). These are statistics that NAMCOL in particular and the Namibian nation in general can be proud of. It required hard work, commitment, dedication, close liaison and focus from all stakeholders, especially the learners. (NAMCOL-Statistical digest 2009)

A study carried out in 2010 to determine the factors that contribute to learners dropping out of the Secondary Education programme provided the following answers as mitigating factors:

1. *Alcohol abuse, lack of parental/self motivation;*
2. *Difficulty to cope with part-time studies; and*
3. *Lack of financial support to pay for examination/transport;*
4. *Long distances to the tutorial centres, implying higher transport costs;*
5. *Pregnancies, lack of family planning*

These were mainly social contributors to the problem of drop-out which challenges NAMCOL to find ways to support its learners to overcome the social challenges faced during their studies.

The figures in **Tables 1.1** and **Table 1.2** provide information with regard to drop-outs within the study year and subject enrolments.

Table 1.1: Drop-out among NAMCOL JSC Learners, 2008-2009 (NAMCOL statistical digest)

Academic year	NAMCOL Subject Enrolments	NAMCOL Subject s not entered for exam	DNEA Subject Entries for NAMCOL	NAMCOL Subject s receiving Incomplete Symbol	Total No. of Subjects Entries not accounted for
2008	25 277		19 081 75.5%		
Drop-outs who did not register for exams		6 196 24.5%			
Drop-outs who did not sit for exams / did not complete all exam components.				1 982 7.8%	
Total Drop-outs					8 178 32.3%
2009	22 276		18 580 83.4%		
Drop-outs who did not register for exams		3 696 16.6%			
Drop-outs who did not sit for exams / did not complete all exam components.				1 601 7.2%	
Total Drop-outs					5 297 23.8%

Table 1.2: Drop-out among NAMCOL NSSCO Learners, 2008-2009(NAMCOL statistical digest)

Academic year	NAMCOL Subject Enrolments	NAMCOL Subject Enrolments not entered for exam	Total of DNEA Subject Entries	DNEA Subject Entries May/Jun	NAMCOL DNEA Subject Entries Oct./Nov	Subject Entries receiving Incomplete Symbol	Total No. of Subject Entries not accounted for
2008	30 822		28 471 92.4%	0*	28 471 92.4%		
Drop-outs who did not register for exams		2 351 7.6%					
Drop-outs who did not sit for exams /did not complete other exam components						3 424 11.1%	
Total Drop-outs							
2009	34 446		29 160 84.7%	0*	29 160 84.7%		
Drop-outs who did not register for exams		5 286 15.3%					
Drop-outs who did not sit for exams /did not complete other exam components						3 429 10.0%	
Total Drop-outs							8 715 25.3%

In 2009, 15.3% of NAMCOL NSSCO subject enrolments did not register for examinations, compared to 7.6% in 2008. A total drop-out rate of 25.3% was recorded in 2009, which is 6.6% higher than in 2008.

V. Conclusion

The learner dropout challenge in Namibia is solvable, provided that student performance is systematically monitored to ensure students are provided with realistic opportunities for open and distance education (ODL) in terms of academic and reading success. The educational success of all ODL students will require explicit attention to social and emotional learning as well as academics, through a focus on cognitive, psychological, and behavioral engagement, along with academic engagement.

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APPENDICES

Covering letters
Questionnaires

An exploratory study on the factors contributing to learner drop at Namibia College of Opening in Namibia

Dear participant:

We are currently involved in a study entitled, "An exploratory study on the factors contributing to learner drop at Namibia College of Opening in Namibia," The study is being conducted for the Sixth Pan-Commonwealth Forum on Open Learning (PCF 6) by Joel Kavetuna from NAMCOL.

We are asking you to please volunteer a few minutes of your time to fill out the attached questionnaire. Your participation in this study is strictly voluntary. We do not foresee this study causing you any harm or discomfort. However, should you be uncomfortable about completing the questionnaire, simply stop doing this. You can skip any questions you feel uncomfortable answering

The results of this participation will be confidential, and we will protect your identity in every way possible. When we publish our findings based on groups, not on individuals. Internet communications are insecure and there is limit to the confidentiality that can be guaranteed due to the technology itself. However, once the completed survey is received by the investigator standard confidentiality procedure will be employed.

If you have any questions about this research, please contact Joel Kavetuna via telephone number 0812862589/ 0613205271.

Sincerely,

kavetuna@namcol.com

Researcher PCF 6

Thanks you for your help with this important research

Learner Questionnaire

Instructions

- a) No name is required
- b) Please answer each question as faithfully as possible
- c) Write answers in the spaces provided or tick (✓) the right answers

Thank you for your assistance

1. Name of Centre

Northern ☐

North-Eastern ☐
Southern

Central ☐

☐

grouping

15 – 18	<input type="checkbox"/>
19 – 21	<input type="checkbox"/>
22 – 25	<input type="checkbox"/>
25 – above	<input type="checkbox"/>

2.

Age

3.

Sex Female ☐

Male ☐

4.

Which of the following academic factors do you experience? Indicate how often you experience the academic factors below by ticking (✓) in appropriate boxes.

Academic Factors	Never	Not often	Often	Very often
I dislike the tutor	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I am absent from centre	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Academic work too difficult	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I dislike subject	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I have problems with English	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I have no tutor to talk about my academic problems	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The tutor do not have confidence in their learners	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Family Factors				
Parents don't have confidence in their children	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I am not motivated by parents	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I do not have proper study facilities at home	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I experience domestic trouble at home	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I cannot afford tuition fees	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

5. Place of studying

Study room	
Bedroom	
Living room or dining room	
With fellow learners	
Under the tree	
other	

6. Where do you study ☐ Near the centre ☐
Far away from the centre

7. What is the study environment like at home/quiet?

Noisy	
Privacy provided	
Frequently disturbance	

8. Which of the following institutional factors do you experience? Indicate how often you experience these problems by ticking (✓) appropriate boxes.

Institutional Factors	Never	Not often	Often	Very often
Not motivated by tutor				
Tutor suspended me				
Unsatisfactory or shortage of study materials				
Inadequate number of tutors				
Overcrowded classes				
Dislike centre				
In conflict with tutor or Head of Centre				
Tutors unfair judgements of my assignments				
I do not agree with centre rules				
I have no tutor to talk to about personal problems				
Social & Psychological Factors				
Nervousness				
Eyesight or hearing problem				
I am in conflict with fellow learners				
I have no friend (s) at the centre				

Ill health				
Changing commitments in relation to my studies				
Sense of isolation				

9. Would you be able to enjoy the centre without friends?

Yes ☐

No ☐

10. Do you regard friends as an important part of one's being at the centre?

Yes ☐

No ☐

11. Did you repeat JSC level?

Yes ☐

No ☐

12. Is there any other institutions offering distance education classes for those who dropout to continue with their education career.

Yes ☐

No ☐

13. If yes to question 12, which institution(s). Mention them.

.....

14. Do you have other reasons for wanting to either absent yourself from or quit NAMCOL?

.....

.....

.....

.....

END!!!

Tutor Questionnaire

Instructions

- a) No name is required
- b) Please answer each question as faithfully as possible.
- c) Answer in the spaces provided or tick (✓) the right answer.

Thanks you for your assistance

1. Name of Centre

Northern ☐

North-Eastern ☐
Southern

Central ☐

☐

2.

Sex Female ☐

Male ☐

3. What reasons/factors led them to drop out?

.....
.....

.....
.....

4. Which of these academic factors could contribute to dropping out of learners at your centre? Indicate how often these factors are experienced at your centre by ticking (✓) in appropriate boxes.

Institutional Factors	Never	Not often	Often	Very often
Absence from classes	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Problem with medium of instruction	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Learner repeating	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Academic work too difficult for learners	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Learners dislike subject	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Too high tutor expectation for learners	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Too low tutor expectation for learners	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Learners dislike tutors					
Social & Psychological Factors					
Learner from single parent					
Cannot afford tuition / exam fees					
Poor home condition					
Learners experiencing domestic trouble at home					
Institutional factors					
Suspension from centre					
Inadequate number of tutors					
Overcrowded classes					
Dislike centre					
Learner and tutor in conflict with each other					
Not obeying centre rules					
No counselling services for learners					
No time to attend to at-risk learners					
No consultation between tutor, learners and parents					
Disobeying tutor's authority					
Social Factors					
Ill health / sickness					
Nervousness					
Taking drugs					
Drinking alcohol					
Pregnancies					
Changing commitments in relation to work					
Sense of isolation					

5. Are you aware of other institutions offering distance education classes for learners who dropout to continue with their education career?

Yes ☐

No ☐

6. If **yes** to question 5, mention these institutions.

.....

7. If **no** to question 5, why do you think this is the case?

.....

.....

8. What should be done in order to prevent learners from dropping out of

learners from NAMCOL JSC level?

.....

9. In your view, what are the means and ways of helping at-risk learners and out-of-school youth?
-

10. Do you think there are any other factor(s), which contribute to dropping out from NAMCOL?
-

11. Give any comments on dropping out from NAMCOL.
-

END!!!

Parent Questionnaire

Instructions

- d) No name is required
 e) Please answer each question as faithfully as possible.
 f) Answer in the spaces provided or tick (✓) the right answer.

Thanks you for your assistance

1. Sex Fe ☐ le ☐ ale
2. Marital Status Single ☐ Married ☐ Widowed ☐ ☐
 Divorced
3. How many children do you have?
4. How many of your children are in NAMCOL?
5. Educational level:

Primary	
Secondary	
Non-formal	
None	

6. Are you employed

Yes ☐ No ☐

7. Occupation

8. How well can you read the newspaper in Oshiwambo or English?

Fair	
Fairly well	
Very well	
Cannot read	

9. Can you afford tuition fees? Yes ☐ No ☐

10. If **no** to question 9, why do you think this is the case?

.....

11. What type of household duties does your child have to do after studying?

.....

12. Where does your child study?

Study room	
Bedroom	
Living or dining room	
With fellow learners	
Under the tree	
Other	

13. What is the study environment like at home?

Quiet ☐ Privacy provided ☐ Noisy ☐ Frequent disturbance occur ☐

14. Do you often experience domestic problems at home? Yes ☐ No ☐

15. Does your child have friend(s)? Yes ☐ No ☐

16. If **yes** to question 15, does this influence your child's academic work

Positively ☐ Negatively ☐

17. If **no** to question 15, does this influence your child's academic work

Positively ☐ Negatively ☐

18. Does your child use any alcohol or drugs?

Yes ☐ No ☐

19. Give any comments on dropping out from NAMCOL.

.....

.....

.....

END!!!